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Washington, D.C.
February 21, 1991

Senator Joseph R. Biden
Chairman
Subcommittee on European Affairs

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon.

The 300,000 Americans of Slovenian descent are proud that Slovenia, the land of their ancestry, after 45 years of one party communist rule, on April 8, 1990, was the first among the six republics of Yugoslavia to opt for free elections and a multi-party system of government.

They were equally proud when three months later, on July 8, 1990, under the freely elected leadership, the Slovenian nation solemnly carried out an act of reconciliation bringing to an end 45 years of repressed antagonisms between two opposing ideologies. With this, the new government committed itself to building a future not on hatred and recrimination, but on understanding and cooperation, with national priorities transcending political and sectarian goals.

More recently, on December 23, 1990 when it became clear that the federation of Yugoslav republics could not reach a workable consensus for future relations, again by the most democratic process, a national plebiscite, 93% of the eligible voters approved by a 95% majority, the creation of an independent democratic country based on respect for human and nationalities rights. The Slovenian people empowered the Slovenian parliament to begin the process of negotiations to lead to political and economic independence within six months. These expressions of democratic values are rooted in the history of the Slovenian nation. As stated on the U.S. Senate floor in 1967 by a great Slovenian and great American, Senator Frank J. Lausche, "For over a thousand years . . . Slovenians believed that the power to govern rested

with the people who were to be governed not those who were governing. They believed that their rulers should be men of the people, of all the people. . .”

It is because of these deeply felt principles that Slovenians strongly objected to the continuing Serbian leadership's repressive methods against Albanians of the Kosovo region, albeit the cradle of Serbian nationhood, but over 90% populated by Albanians. Strong Slovenian stand in support for human rights of the Albanian minority created a rift between the two republics which has been continuously worsening to this day.

Slovenia is one of the smallest Yugoslav republics. Of 23 million people living in Yugoslavia, approximately 8% are Slovenians. In Slovenia 90% of the population is ethnically Slovenian. Economically, Slovenia is by far the most prosperous and economically advanced, producing 25% of the Yugoslav GNP and 35% of the hard currency exports. Bordering on Austria and Italy, it sees itself as part of western rather than eastern Europe and hopes eventually to integrate into the European Common Market. Because of its export oriented economy, the 1990 reforms implemented by the Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic severely damaged Slovenia's economy. With an overvalued dinar, Slovenia's products became too expensive on international markets contributing to the collapse and bankruptcy of profitable Slovenian businesses.

Equally detrimental for the future of Slovenia are political developments. With only 8% of the Yugoslav population, Slovenia seeks a loose confederation of Yugoslav republics similar to Benelux (Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg) while Serbia, with over 40% of the Yugoslav population, supports a strong central government of federated republics. In ethnically pluralistic societies (like Yugoslavia) majority rule often means majority dictatorship rather than

democracy. Such societies need a "democratic" regime based on consensus instead of opposition, where inclusion rather than exclusion is emphasized. Unlike the United States, a country created by immigrants who list the U.S. as their own (even though many might call themselves German Americans, Italian Americans, African Americans, etc.), Yugoslavia is a country of individual nations who freely joined the Yugoslav federation. In fact only 5% of all Yugoslav citizens in the 1980 census declared themselves members of the Yugoslav nation. The other 95% listed their nationalities as Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Albanian, etc. The Slovenian and Serbian leaderships have been at odds on this issue and there is no solution in sight. The relationships have deteriorated to the point where the Serbian republic has unilaterally imposed a 50% tariff on all products from Slovenia. The recent electoral victory by the leader of the former communist party of Serbia, Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, who received a clear mandate to continue with the strongly centrist, one party policies of past years has strengthened these repressive policies.

At this time the outlook for major agreements among the various republics of Yugoslavia is purely academic. How can western European democracies and the United States support a regime that clearly represents and supports the former communist mentality? Having freely chosen democracy and a market economy, what choice has the Slovenian nation but to opt for an independent Slovenia, a status which will enable it to continue the peaceful process of democratic development.

As the leading democracy in the world and a champion of human rights, the United States cannot ignore national aspirations and the right of self-determination even though this might mean a rupture of the European political mosaic. The United States must encourage and support

the democratic process and its implementation whenever it appears.

Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the two federations of nationalities who are presently experiencing secessionist tendencies within their existing federations should be made aware that the United States Congress is determined to defend and support free expressions and basic freedoms. These democratic movements which have been set in motion with the lifting of the iron curtain cannot and should not be stopped. They are at the forefront of a new world order, one where universally guaranteed individual human rights will lift the human spirit to ever greater and challenging frontiers of democracy.

Karl B. Bonutti
President, Slovenian American
Heritage Foundation